Scutellaria Lateriflora. #10

Jeremiah Smith English – N Jersey –

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On the Scutellaria Lateriflora

Notwithstanding the great progress the medical science has made within the last century, by the labours of individuals who have distinguished themselves by their talents and abilities, still we are under the melancholy necessity of confessing, that there do exist, diseases, which have baffled the skill of Physicians for ages past, and which even by the most eminent, of the present day, are confessed to be beyond the reach of any known medicine. Nevertheless we cannot avoid looking forward with pleasing anticipation, to that happy era when these destroyers of human felicity, shall be completely subject to the healing art. Among the numerous diseases which are justly entitled to the appellation of opprobria medicorum, none are perhaps more so, than that afflicting disease, arising from the bite of a rabid animal; called Hydrophobia, a disease truly terrible in its nature, & dreadful in

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its consequences. It is well known to all persons engaged in the practice of medicine, that considering the incurable nature of this disease, Physicians of all ages endeavoured to find an antidote or specific for it. These nostrums were numerous indeed, and many of them, no doubt enjoyed a reputation far beyond their merit. But it is not less known (at least, to a majority of persons,) that in more modern times, a remedy has been offered as an antidote, whose reputed efficacy is so great, that should future experience confirm its virtues, this dreadful disease will no longer be more unmanageable, than the mildest with which we are acquainted. By describing & considering the virtues of this article, the Scutellaria Lateriflora, I hope to fulfil the object of this paper.

This remedy was first discovered and introduced into practice by the late Doct^r Vanderveer of New Jersey; with whom for some considerable time it remained a secret, such however was its success in his hands, that he acquired great reputation for the

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prevention & cure of this disease; so much so, that he was resorted to by numerous persons, living at no inconsiderable distance from him. Although this article as yet has not receive a the sanction of Physicians in general; yet I believe there are not wanting others who advocate its virtues & can bear testimony of its efficacy. I shale now proceed with a description of the plant taken from observation and reading.

Of the Scutellaria there are numerous species indigenous to the United States, the one however contended for, is the Latiniflora; it is found principally in low damp situations, as near brooks, ponds, creeks, ditches &c but especially in marshy meadows; it attains the height of from one to three feet; the stem or stalk is square and branched, of a greenish colour, except near the root where it is reddish, the fibres of which when washed are of a pale yellow; the leaves arise from the stalk laterally, situated up on a small petiole or leafstalk, having their edges serrated; the racemes are lateral, proceeding from the

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stalk, immediately above the leaves, bearing other leaves interspersed with numerous small blue flowers, which make their appearance from July to September; the corolla are two in number; the upper one, flattened somewhat at its sides is largest; its edge being divided into three parts by two notches, the middle one of which is largest; it has also an arched appearance; the lower lip if minutely examined, will also be found slightly notched; the organs of fructification are, of the stamina four; two long and two short, situated on the corolla; the pistillum is single; the calix or flower cup, is composed of two lips, which after florescence close or shut up, and contain the seeds: on the upper part of the calix is a small process, resembling very much one of the lips, which though small at first grows to considerable size. Such is the description of the plant. In preparing this article, it is recommended to gather it in July or August while in bloom; carefully dry & preserve it from exposure; when a person has been bitten by a rabid

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animal he must take a strong infusion of it twenty hours, for a number of days in succession; working stimulating articles both of meat & drink; such is the prescription of Dr Vanderveer, and it is even said that of three hundred persons bitten, who applied to him, the success of the article was complete, except in one solitary instance. Such an assertion as this, coming from so respectable a Physician as Dr Vanderveer ought to be entitled to no inconsiderable respect. But the question may be asked here, does not its failure in one instance, indicate considerably against the complete preventive powers of the article? So this I think we may answer in the negative: for it appears that in the case alluded to although the remedy was taken at first for a few days, the use of the article was not persevered in; therefore the ceiling of this case ought to bear little, or no weight, as an objection to its virtues. But let us consider some of the objections which may arise against the virtues of this plant. In the first place, there is a probability that

the dog or animal by which the wound was inflicted, although it shewed symptoms of disease, may not have been affected with rabies canina. And in the next place, it may be said, admitting the animal to be rabid, a possibility is, its symptoms of hydrophobia may not shew themselves in the person bitten by such animal. As to the first objection, I must acknowledge, that there is occasionally some difficulty in ascertaining the true nature of the case; never the less there are not wanting cases where the animal was actually rabid, proved by his having bitten several other animals which became affected with the same disease; several of this nature are on record, and one instance shall relate. As to the second objection, admitting as fact that not more than one in twenty of those bitten become affected, as is stated by Mr Hunter; calculating in the same ratio there ought to have been a much greater number among those which came under the observation of Van Swieten; but we find this is not the case;

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owing to the preventive virtues of the article under consideration. But as before mentioned, notwithstanding the difficulty occasionally of knowing the true nature of the state of the dog, the following case among many others goes to prove conclusively, that the dog was mad.

In it as will be seen there were three ~~persons~~ subjects bitten all within a few minutes of each other, and under similar circumstances; two of which died of the disease, the third making use of the Scutellaria shewed no symptoms of such disease

Case. A dog belonging to a respectable farmer named J. G. was bitten by a neighbouring dog, which at the time was not known to be mad; but which afterwards manifested such symptoms. About two weeks after the dog was bitten, he began to shew symptoms indicating his situation, such as sullenness; disobedience; a peculiar appearance in the eyes; saliva dropping from his mouth; melancholy; wandering about the place & snapping at different persons and animals, during which time he bit a hog & a horse; and

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immediately after an indented boy, named H. L. who was in the act of chastening him. The wound was in the hand & to a considerable size. After confinement the dog showed symptoms of great distress, refusing food, making a desmal howl; frothing extremely at the mouth, & in this state expired. In a short time the boy began to show symptoms which indicated his situation, and in a short time afterwards becoming evidently mad, was killed. The horse also became diseased though not so soon, as was known by the great distress in which he was; being melancholy when alone, but furiously delirious when any person approached him, running at them, with a disposition to bite; in this situation he was confined in a large pen made for the purpose; refusing nourishment of all kinds; his symptoms of distress increasing & his strength decreasing after much raving, pawing, & groaning, he expired. The lad however procured and made use of the antidote in the manner recommended; the wound healed kindly, & he experienced no other unpleasant

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symptoms. — That the dog in this case was affected with rabies canina I think we must conclude from the symptoms under which he laboured. And as we know that the disease is communicated from one animal to another by the saliva, we must conclude from the symptoms present in them, that the disease under which they laboured was of the same nature as that of the dog by which they were bitten. As to the lad, ought we not conclude that as all were alike exposed to the cause, all ought to become affected? This however was not the case; the boy making use of the article in question, shewed no symptom of disease. I would then ask, does not this case afford strong grounds for concluding that the plant is wrongly possessed of the virtues ascribed to it? But this however is not an isolated case; several others of a similar nature might be adduced. In drawing the conclusion then, that the article is possessed of these powers, it may naturally be asked in what way does it produce this healthy effect? To this question, as far as I am acquainted it is impossible to give a satisfactory answer; its modus operandi is perhaps involved in

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obscurity. Nor can I learn from those who have taken it as from myself having taken it in health, that its sensible operation is at all perceptible; the only quality I am acquainted with existing in it, is an intense bitter. But we must conclude that it is not on this alone, that its antidotal virtues; for if so, why might we not expect the same result from some other article possessing this property in a more eminent degree? Whatever rank this plant may hold in the medical world, the prejudices of the vulgar in favour of its efficacy are very great; and considering the incurable nature of the disease, & the prejudices of ~~the vulgar~~ many patients in its favour, I think that with the excision of the bitter part & perhaps cauterization of the wound, it would not be improper to suffer the patient the enjoyment of his prejudice, or confidence which alone might have some tendancy perhaps to prevent the disease. Although the excision of the part was not I believe a part of the practice of Dr Vandervoer, yet I think Physicians would do well, not to rely solely on the article, to the exclusion of the knife altogether.— Before I

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Conclude however I must not omit expressing my most ardent desire, that Physicians in general would turn their attention to this article, in order either to confirm its virtues, or reject it as altogether useless & inert. "Should (however in the language of Dr Thatcher) the plant prove a successful remedy for a disease so truly deplorable in its nature and destructive in its consequences, no enconiums can surpass its merit, even if recorded in letters of Gold". Should however this happy result not be confirmed by future experience, the consolation of its advocates will be, that like many of its kindred predecessors, it at one time at least enjoyed a considerable reputation.

To Conclude. To you Gentlemen I feel grateful for the instruction you have given and the respect you have shewn me: I go from you, but your happiness shall ever be my desire and your reputation my glory. Finis.